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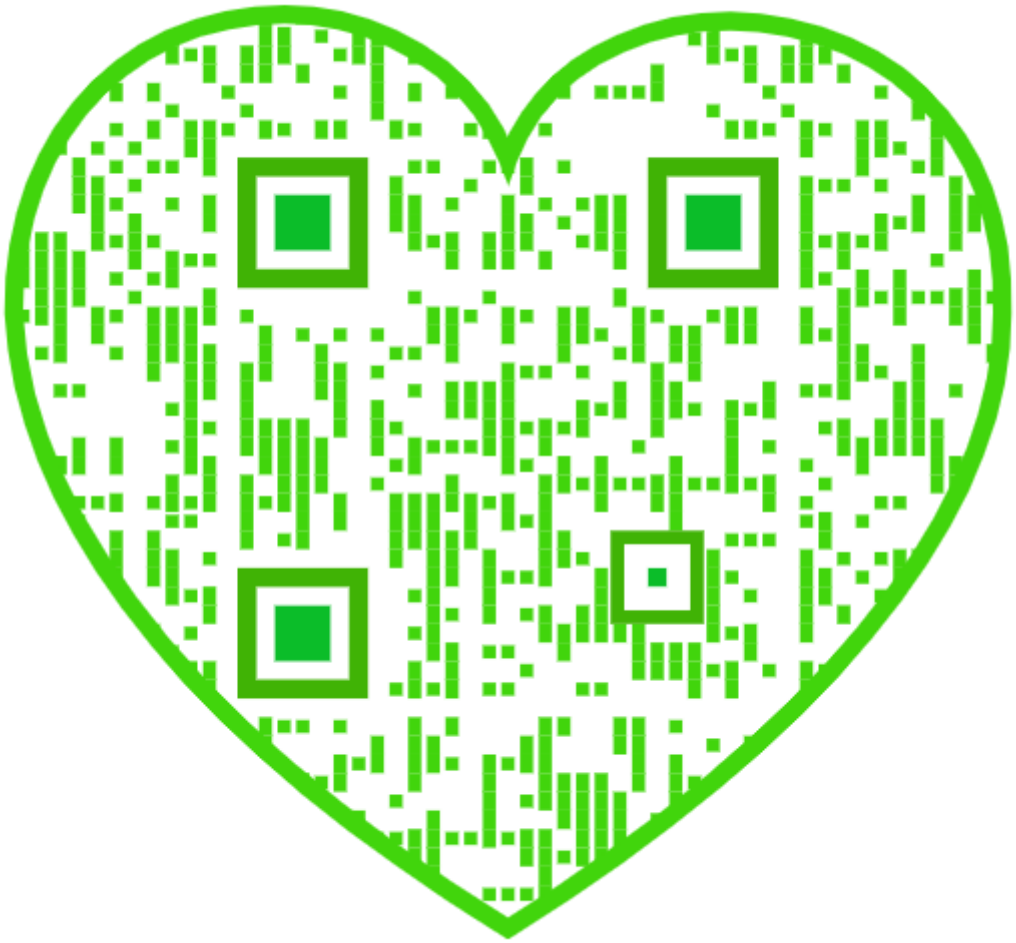

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No. 93.

Holly Tree Inn

A Play in One Act

BY

MRS. OSCAR BERINGER

ADAPTED BY EXPRESS PERMISSION OF, AND ARRANGEMENT WITH MESSRS. CHAPMAN AND HALL, FROM THE LATE CHARLES DICKENS' CHRISTMAS STORY, "THE HOLLY TREE."

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HOLLY TREE INN.

Produced at Terry's Theatre, London, on January 15th, 1891, with the following cast :

Characters.

JAB. COBBS, Landlord of "Holly Tree Inn"	Mr. Ernest Hendrie.
CAPTAIN WALMERS, of Walmers Court	Mr. H. Reeves Smith.
TOM, Stableman of "Holly Tree Inn"	Mr. Fred. Baxter.
HARRY WALMERS, Only Child of Captain Walmers	Miss Véra Beringer.
MRS. COBBS, Landlady of "Holly Tree Inn"	Mrs. E. H. Brooke.
BETTY, Chambermaid	Miss Mary Collette.
NORAH, Harry's Sweetheart	Miss Minnie Terry.

"HOLLY TREE INN."

Old-fashioned parlour or hall. Decorated for Christmas. Casement window L. C. *Old linen press* L. *corner. Large fireplace* L. *Fire. Old screen, very large old-fashioned settle. Table and chair before fire. Large kettle on fire. Brass candle-sticks on mantel shelf, old China. Centre door leading into courtyard. Snowy landscape seen through window. Old oak staircase* R. *Bedrooms* R. C. *and* R. *at top of short gallery leading to bedroom* C. *Door* R. (*at foot of staircase into house,*) *grandfather's striking clock in bend of stairs. Sanded floor. Dresser with lamp on* R. *Lantern hung on wall in flat.*

(COBBS *asleep on large chair* C. *beside fire, his pipe hanging and newspaper on floor.* MRS. COBBS *standing on stool before linen press.* BETTY *below her receiving parcel of linen.*

MRS. COBBS. (*counting*) Six, seven, eight nopkins, an' three tea cloths, one best an' two unbleached—thee'll lay them all oot for use, Betty—an' moind this un wi' the paatch, 'tis mortal tender.

BETTY. Be I to tak' the frilled sheets for the beds oop yon? (*throws her thumb over her shoulder at bedroom door*)

MRS. COBBS. Surely the lass mun be daft to taalk o' frilled sheets wi' the snaw driftin' high as the hedges! Wa'at decent fok' dost think wad be oot

trapesin' o' New Year's Eve in such weather, less it wur a daft Gretna Green coople!

BETTY. Eh marm, d'ye think a Gretna Green job moight coom i' the coatch this night—eh! t'wad be graand!

MRS. COBBS. Graand indeed, I've naw patience wi' ye, Betty; graand to see twa poor silly bodies tearin' in white and tremblin' as if awld Nick himself wur at their heels!

BETTY. Eh!—graand?

MRS. COBBS. An' the 'osses a latherin' an' the ostlers a swearin' an' *she* a cryin' and he a kissin' her as hard as he can go!

BETTY. (*with a scream of delight*) Eh! lawks—graander an' graander!

MRS. COBBS. An' they're hardly oot a' the hoose when in comes the feythers tearin' in mad as mad—cussin' and stampin'. "Ye dooble dyed villian, where's ma child?" cries one. "You've entrapped my boy—scoondrel!" says the other, and off they both is, huntin' i' the coal cellars, and turnin' oot the coopboards, and finish oop by faallin' in apple-plexies on the floor for all the world as nat'ral as the Theater R'yal, York, an' that's the rumpus thee calls graand is it?

BETTY. (*much excited*) Eh! marm—it's more nor graand, its better nor the Theater—it's—it's—

(COBBS *gives a loud snore and noisy start, pipe falls breaks.*)

BETTY. (*screams loudly and drops linen*) It's—lawks a mercy—what's that?

MRS. COBBS. Mercy on us, Cobbs—how ye do startle a body!

(BETTY *is scrambling linen into her apron.*)

Betty, ye're a mussin' up them nopkins shameful—take 'em in and fold 'em proper, ye lazy hussy!

(*Exit* BETTY R. *tossing her head.*)

COBBS. (*rubbing his gouty foot*) Oh, Lord, that were a good un! Ugh! (*bends to pick up pieces*) Another gone to glory!

MRS. COBBS. Nasty filthy things! I know where they comes from, and I wish they'd stay there!

COBBS. (*rubbing his eyes*) Maria, I'se bin dreamin'. I'se bin back at Walmers Court in my old place as gardener. I'se bin sweepin' up the leaves and trundlin' the ole barrer as if I'd never left 'em!

MRS. COBBS. Ye ain't sorry ye hung oop your hat on the old Holly Tree, Cobbs? Ah! ye was allays a rollin' stone!

COBBS. My dear, you was the only moss I ever gathered, and I'se done a goodish bit o' rollin' in my time! (*winks*) But I'se bin back at the old Hall, Maria, as I ain't seen these two years, an' the Captain, straight an' handsome as ever, have given me his orders, and I'se seen them two blessed children Master Harry, the Captain's only child, and his little sweetheart Miss Norah, as used to come over from Walmer Cottage to spend the day—an I'se seen 'em a trottin' up and down my gravel walks agin, he a recitin' "The young May Moon is beamin', love," and she a lookin' up at him wi' her little 'art in her eyes!

MRS. COBBS. Pretty dears!

COBBS. Maria, that old garden was chock full o' love! The bees hummed it an' the birds sang it. Every step their little feet took they sowed love. I stood out again it as long as a able bodied man could, but I'm dashed if I didn't give in at last an'—

MRS. COBBS. An' you brought the harvest home to me, Cobbs, God bless you and them!

(*Muffled roll of wheels heard outside as if on snow.*)

COBBS. (*putting his hand up to his ear*) Eh, what's that?

MRS. COBBS. Naught, but the wind!

COBBS. (*cross*) The wind don't roll like that—them's wheels!

MRS. COBBS. (*goes to window*) Ah—caan't see naught for the snaw! How it dew coom down! Lord ha' mercy on them as is afoot this night!

(*Enter* TOM, *old ostler.*)

TOM. Maasther—there be a po'chay turnin' into the yard!

COBBS. Don't stan' jabberin' there—tak a lantern oot, lad.—tak' a lantern oot!

(TOM *takes lantern from wall, lights it, goes out.*)

(COBBS *stands at door.*)

(*Enter* BETTY *downstairs.*)

BETTY. Marm—there be a po'chay—dew ye think it'll be a graand Gretna Green job?

MRS. COBBS. Dew I think thee the graandest fule I ever clapped eyes on?

(*Exit* BETTY *upstairs.*)

(*Nearer noise of wheels and carriage stopping.*)

COBBS. (*at door*) This way, sir,—mind the step, sir; it be mortal slippy!

(*Enter* CAPTAIN WALMERS)

COBBS. (*touches his forehead*) Captain Walmers, sir!

WALMERS. (*much agitated advances, looks round anxiously and rapidly*) Cobbs, they're not here?

COBBS. Nobody's here, sir! 'Cept me and my old woman!

(MRS. COBBS *curtseys.*)

WALMERS. (*sinks on chair* R. *of table*) Good God!

COBBS. (*anxiously*) Master—master—what d'ye mean—who should be here?

WALMERS. The boy and Norah!

MRS. COBBS. What?

COBBS. Not Master Harry and Miss Norah out alone to-night!

WALMERS. (*quietly*) Yes—we missed them both several hours ago, from my mother's house. They've disappeared without a trace—we've searched everywhere in vain. (*rises, turns away*)

MRS. COBBS. Oh! if them babbies is oot on the moors this cruel night!

WALMERS. At last, I thought of you, Cobbs, Harry always liked you. And—Cobbs—I remembered that snowy New Year's Eve, eleven years ago, when I brought his dear mother here—here to this very house to make her my wife, and I thought—I hoped—I prayed—that I might find those two, my boy and his little sweetheart sitting on that old settle as we did then—safe, sheltered from the bitter night, but it is empty; they are not here! Merciful Heavens! what has become of them—where shall I turn—where shall I seek? (*breaks down, turns away, leaning his head on his arm*)

MRS. COBBS. (*aside*) They've come back to me after all these years, I see 'em both on that old settle afore the fire, he wi' his arms roond her, an' she like a lovely white bird shelterin' on his breast!

COBBS. (*advancing lays his hand respectfully on* WALMERS' *shoulder*) Cheer up, master—cheer up—we'll find 'em yet!

WALMERS. There is a hope they may have reached the next Inn!

COBBS. Ay! ay! the "Spotted Dog," five miles further on!

WALMERS. Five miles! I must delay no longer—I must start at once!

(*Enter* Tom.)

Cobbs. If it warn't for this danged leg o' mine that keeps me here like a lame chicken, I'd come wi' ye myself!

Tom. (*hobbles forward*) Ah'll go—ah'll go, measther. Ah know every stick an' stone o' the road! (*shuffles into comical mackintosh*) Ah can lead the horse! (*takes up lantern and stands at door*)

Walmers. (*making effort to speak calmly, but evidently overwhelmed with emotion*) Cobbs, if they come—or—if they're brought here—you'll do all you can for them! (*holds out his hand*—Cobbs *silently grasps it*)

(*Exit* Walmers *followed by* Tom, *noise of wheels gradually growing fainter.*)

Mrs. Cobbs. God be wi' him, an' them two babies!

Cobbs. Amen! (*rubs his sleeve across his eyes*)

Mrs. Cobbs. (*bustling about*) An' now I'll get all ready 'gen they coom!

Cobbs. (*sniffing and rubbing his face vigorously as if to dismiss all forebodings*) Ay, ay, missus, 'gainst they coom!

Mrs. Cobbs. (*calling loudly*) Betty! Betty! Where's the lazy hussy trapesin' noo?—Betty! Betty!

Betty. Coomin', marm, coomin'!

(*Enter* Betty *from upstairs.*)

Mrs. Cobbs. (*goes to press, unlocks it, takes out linen*) Here—tak' these sheets and put 'em to air!

Betty. Will it be a Gretna Green job afther all, marm?

Mrs. Cobbs. It 'ull be a month's warning job if ye worrit me any more wi' your Gretna Greens. An ye're to heat the warmin' pan, an' the hot bottles, an light the fires. Shame on ye, Betty Morris, ye'se naught but men folks an' love-makin' in your head!

BETTY. (*blubbering loudly, wipes her eyes on her apron*) Ah didn't mean no harm, marm, ah didn't mean no harm!

COBBS. (*thumps table with his fist*) Lord's sake! Stop that danged blitherin' noise—ye make my leg shoot like the very devil!

MRS. COBB. An' now ye're makin' that poor man sin wi' swearin'! ye'll come to naw good! Betty Morris, ye'll coom to naw good, an' mind that kettle is on the boil for the bottles!

BETTY. But if they're in luve—

MRS. COBB. (*pushing her*) Get along wi' ye wi' yer love, and yer Gretna Greens! Ye'll leave at the end o' the month!

BETTY. (*aside*) She'se got her own man—an ah'se naught but warmin' pans and water bottles! Ah wish ah wur dead—I wish I wur dead!

(*Exit up staircase crying loudly and wiping her eyes.*)

MRS. COBBS. (*turning round sharply*) What are ye doin' oop there, Cobbs?

COBBS. (*at stand putting on leggings and getting down coat*) Maria, its no good! I can't stop in this house wi' a roof over me and them children out o' doors! I'm going after 'em! (*slips on coat*)

MRS. COBBS. Oh, Cobbs—not wi' yer puir leg, Cobbs; not wi' yer puir leg!

COBBS. Give me a chance, old gal, and I'll go wi'out it!

MRS. COBBS. Oh, Cobbs—doan't ee go, Cobbs; doan't ee go out, ye'll catch your death, man!

COBBS. Death or no death, Maria, I'm goin'! I feel their little hands a drawin' me more powerful than a four horse team!

MRS. COBBS. (*wiping her eyes*) Doan't ee go, Cobbs—doan't ee go!

COBBS. It's no use tryin' to keep me back Maria—I goes—and there's an end of it!

(*Horn heard.*)

MRS. COBB. There's the coach on the hill!

COBBS. Drat the coach—the coach is nothing to me. I'm going to find the bairns!

MRS. COBBS. Wait till they're oop, man; they may ha' heard somethin'!

COBBS. (*grumbling, fastening on his coat*) Well, I ain't goin' out! Jim 'ull see to the horse! Who'll be travellin' in such weather!

(*Noise and rattle of coach stopping* L. *Men's voices,* "go to he head, Jim; steady, steady," etc.)

MRS. COBBS. (*opens door*)

HARRY. (*Outside*) That's for yourself, guard!

COBBS. (*jumps*) Eh! What's that?

MRS. COBBS. (*much excited*) It's the children! It's the children, Cobbs!

COBBS. (*shouts*) The children's come and they're safe and sound! (*breaks into dance, forgets his leg*) La di da di diddly! (*gets shoot*) La di—Lord ha' mercy on my leg! Ugh!—(*rubs it—takes coat off*)

HARRY. (*still outside*) We stop here to-night please, sitting room and two bedrooms will be required! Fowl and plum pudding for two!

COBBS. That's him—that's him! Fowl and plum pudding for two!

MRS. COBBS. Don't stand gapin' there, man! coom along out and gi' 'em a welcome!

COBBS. (*aside*) Lord! Lord! What's bred in the bone will out in the flesh!

(*Enter* HARRY *arm in arm with* NORAH. *She has a doll under her arm, very small parasol, and smelling bottle, orange half eaten, China ring with "Harry" in gilt letters,* 8 *peppermint drops.*)

HARRY. Mind the step, love! (*to* MRS. COBBS) Good evening, ma'am!

MRS. COBBS. (*curtesying*) Good evening, sir! Welcome to Holly Tree Inn, sir!

HARRY. Thank you! (*takes* NORAH *to chair* R. *of table*) Sit down, love, while I make the necessary arrangements!

NORAH. (*pettishly*) I don't want to, I'm dreffful tired of sitting down! (*stands biting the ribbon of her tippet*)

HARRY. (*shrugs his shoulders*) Oh well! If you won't, you won't, but it would be much better for you!

NORAH. Bother!

COBBS. (*aside to* MRS. COBBS) Bless 'em, they've begun already. (*rubs his chin in delight*)

HARRY. (*aside*) Tut, tut, dear! dear! Overtired, nerves unstrung, she's hungry! (*turns towards* COBBS *who has been intentionally keeping his back towards them*) Landlord—I—we—(*recognizes* COBBS) Why, it's Cobbs—dear old Cobbs! Norah—Norah—here's Cobbs, our own old Cobbs!

NORAH. (*throws down her armful of things*)—Oh, Cobbs—Cobbs! We are so glad to see, you, Cobbs! (*comes down* L. *of* COBBS)

HARRY. Yes, we are are so glad, Cobbs, oh! how delightful it is to meet someone one knows!

COBBS. I thought it was you, sir, I thought I couldn't be mistaken in your style and figure, sir!

HARRY. (*with a slight sigh*) It's been rather a long way, Cobbs!

NORAH. Yes, and brekkust was a long, long time ago!

MRS. COBBS. Poor dear lamb! She oughter had summat on the way!

(HARRY *looks at* MRS. COBBS *and rubs his chin.*)

COBBS. My old ooman, sir!

HARRY. (*to* MRS. COBBS, *as if he somewhat resented reproach of neglect*) She did have something on the way! I thought of that, Mrs. Cobbs, and I told her to bring some cold buttered toast with her!

NORAH (*tearfully*) I did—but it got smudgy! Look at it! (*drags it out of her pocket*)

COBBS. Well, sir, 'tain't to be denied its a trifle stodgy!

HARRY. She sat on it!

NORAH. I didn't! (*turns to* MRS. COBBS *shows her toast, and talks*)

HARRY. (*aside to* COBBS) Cross! (*shrugs his shoulders*)

COBBS. (*aside to* HARRY) Don't take no notice, sir! They're all like that sometimes! (*aloud*) But what may be the exact natur' o' your plans, sir?

HARRY. We're going to be married at Gretna Green, Cobbs!

COBBS. (*in delight*) Maria, they're going to be married at Gretna Green!

NORAH. (*runs forward to* HARRY) Yes—at Gretna Green, Cobbs!

COBBS. (*aside to* MRS. COBBS) Didn't I say so?

MRS. COBBS. What's to be done?

HARRY. We've run away on purpose! We made up our minds to it years ago, didn't we, Norah!

NORAH. Yes, ebber so many years ago!

MRS. COBBS. (*pulling* COBBS' *sleeves*) Cobbs, something must be done—think o' the poor feyther's anxiety!

COBBS. Will ye excuse me, sir, I want a word wi' Mrs. Cobbs about that there fowl! (*aside to* MRS. COBBS *near door*) Wrap yourself up warm! Tell Jim to put the mare to and be off to catch the Captain oop! He'll not reach the Spotted Dog long before ye! Tell him they're both safe here with me!

MRS. COBBS. I'll only bide to pick up my shawl!

(*Exit* MRS. COBBS R.)

HARRY. (*helping* NORAH) Let me take off your bonnet, love.

NORAH. (*who has been looking after* MRS. COBBS) Where's she going?

COBBS. She'll be back, in a jiffey! She's gone to

see to that there dinner, ma'am! (*Aside*) The Lord forgive me for that lie!

NORAH. I hope she'll get it soon! I'se dreffful hungry! (*crosses to settle*)

HARRY. My coat, Cobbs! (COBBS *hangs it on banisters*)

HARRY. (*draws* COBBS *down on settle*) Sit down here, Cobbs. We want to talk to you—Norah's rather in low spirits, Cobbs; but she'll be happier now that you'll be our friend!

NORAH. (*on other side, lays her cheek on his arm*) Yes, you'll be our friend, won't you, Cobbs?

HARRY. And we'll go on in the morning and be married to-morrow!

COBBS. Jest so, sir. Would it meet your views, sir, if I was to accompany you, sir?

HARRY AND NORAH. (*jumping up with joy*) Yes—yes—yes! That's just what we want, Cobbs!

NORAH. (*lays her cheek on his arm*) Dear Cobbs!

HARRY. Good Cobbs! (*they kiss each other across him*)

COBBS. (*aside over their heads*) Oh these blessed innercents!—Cobbs, you're a Judas. (*to children*) Well, sir——

NORAH. Yes, Cobbs!

COBBS. And ma'am, if you would excuse the freedom of my offerin' a suggestion.

HARRY. Certainly, Cobbs—it's very kind of you!

COBBS. (*aside*) H'm! Judas agin! (*aloud*) I'm acquainted with a pony, sir, in conjunction with a pheayton which would carry you and Mrs. Harry Walmers junior—

HARRY. (*interrupting*) We must get you some cards at once, Norah!

COBBS. Myself—driving—to the end o' your journey in a jiffey!

NORAH. (*claps her hands*) Bootiful—bootiful!

HARRY. Nothing could be better, Cobbs!

COBBS. But the unfortunate thing is, that there

pony is just begun to be clipped and he mustn't be took out in that state for fear it might strike to his inside!

HARRY. Of course not!

NORAH. Poor darling!

COBBS. (*rises, crosses* C.) I don't say you will—but you might have to stay over to-morrow! eh? (*side*) Ananias, (*looks from* NORAH *to* HARRY *to see how they will take it*)

HARRY. *We* don't mind, do we, Norah?

NORAH. Not a bit, Harry; if you will come with us, Cobbs!

HARRY. (*goes* L. *of table takes out long purse with ring, money in it*) You see, Cobbs, it doesn't matter in the least, for I have a very heavy sum of money with me. Grandmamma gave me a five pound note at Christmas!

COBBS. (R. *of table*) Ah, there's a spankin sum o' money for ye, sir!

HARRY. Yes—a person could do a good deal with such a sum of money as that, couldn't a person, Cobbs?

COBBS. I believe you, sir!

HARRY. I always thought this sort of thing might happen so I saved it up. Grandmamma said I was to do what I liked with it, I did—I ran away with Norah! (*has reached* NORAH *before whom he kneels putting his arm round her waist, she plays with his curls*)

COBBS. (*rises, looks round*) Did you bring any luggage with you, sir!

HARRY. Only a few things, they're on the table!

COBBS. (*counting them over*) A parasol, a smelling bottle, eight peppermint drops, sticky, a rag doll!

NORAH. That's not luggage, Cobbs—that's my Emily! (*goes over and takes her up*)

COBBS. Beg pardon, ma'am, I'm sure. A orange and a chaney mug with the name of Harry on it! What ye might call light marching order, sir!

HARRY. (*stands before fire with legs straddled*) You see we came away in rather a hurry, Cobbs!

NORAH. Yes, you did flurry me so, Harry! I'se dreffful hungry, I want my dinner! (*sits chair* c. *puts her arms on the table and her head on them*—HARRY *puts his arm round her and plays with her hair*)

HARRY. It won't be long—bear up, Norah!

NORAH. (*fretfully*) Oh don't tease, Harry!

HARRY. (*reproachfully*) Norah, my young May Moon, your Harry tease you!

NORAH. Yes, and I want to go home!

HARRY. (*aside to* COBBS) She's only tired, Cobbs—that's all!

COBBS. (*aside to* HARRY) That's all, sir!

HARRY. Go upstairs, Norah dear, and bathe your face in a basin of water with a dash of eau de cologne in it and you'll feel quite different!

NORAH. I think the orange and the peppermints would be better!

HARRY. You're wrong, Norah, but of course you will have your own way!

(NORAH *is counting peppermints.*)

COBBS. (*aside to* HARRY) They all do, sir! 'Tain't no use a strugglin'!

NORAH. (*whimpering*) Somebody's gone and taken one of my peppermints—I had eight!

COBBS. And I'll take my affydavit I counted eight just now, ma'am!

HARRY. Dear, dear, I'm afraid you're rather a baby, Norah!

NORAH. (*cries*) I'm not a baby—I want my pep'mint—I believe you eat it!

HARRY. Norah—how unjust you are! There! (*breathes in her face*) Now have I eaten it?

COBBS. Why, here it is, ma'am, two stuck together!

HARRY. Come, Norah, come and get off your

things, dear. Would you like me to push you behind like I do to help Grandmamma upstairs?

NORAH. How can you be so silly, Harry—give me your arm! (*both crossing* R. *to staircase*)

COBBS. Well, I'll go and bring up the dinner!

(*Exit* COBBS R.)

NORAH. What is there to be for dessert, Harry? Have you ordered the currant wine and the cakes an' the apples and the jam?

HARRY. Dear—dear! I had forgotten all about that. I'll talk to Cobbs when we've got you upstairs! (*they toil upstairs, she stops on first step*—NORAH *begins to cry*)

NORAH. Oh dear!—oh dear!

HARRY. Why Norah, what's the matter—you're crying, love!

NORAH. (*sobs*) Oh! I'se so misereeyable—I'se so tired!

HARRY. Norah, my dear, this is weakness, you must not give way like this!

NORAH. (*sob*) Oh, I'se so misereeyable! (*goes up another step, sob*) And the stairs is so slippy!

HARRY. Do you think you'd feel any happier if I carried you up, Norah!

NORAH. Praps—praps—you might—you may try.

HARRY. (*takes hold of her*) Put your arms very tight round my neck, Norah, in case—in case I might slip! Tut, tut, tut, dear—dear, you *are* heavy!

(*Staggers,* NORAH *is in his arms so that she faces the audience over his shoulder, her eyes are shut—he staggers against banisters.*)

NORAH. (*complainingly*) I'se not at all comf'ble, Harry!

HARRY. (*puffing and blowing*) Neither am I. Norah love—you're such an armful—oh dear!—there!

(*Slips and falls on stairs dropping her sitting in front of audience*—NORAH *howls loudly.*)

NORAH. Oh my poor head—my poor head!

HARRY. Norah, forgive me—forgive me—I am so grieved, dear, believe me, it hurts me ever so much more than it does you!

NORAH. B—bosh—it's *my* head!

HARRY. "When he who adores thee has left but the——"

NORAH. Bump—feel it!

HARRY. Dear—dear! This is very distressing—and I meant to make your life a dream, Norah!

NORAH. You're too young to cally me, you'd better push me behind like Grandmamma! (*throws herself back, on* HARRY)

HARRY. (*puffing as he runs her up*) You'd better hold on to the banisters as well, Norah dear, your weight is considerable!

NORAH. You never said I was fat before, Harry!

HARRY. We can't stop to discuss the point now, Norah; we must get you upstairs at all costs! (*makes a final spurt up to landing, sinks on top stair exhausted*) There!—you're safe—thank Heaven!

NORAH. You're very clumsy and very rough, Harry!

HARRY. (*wiping his forehead*) No, Norah, it was a crisis in our lives and had to be carried by storm!

NORAH. (*petulantly*) I won't have my hair brushed and I can't brush it myself!

HARRY. (*soothingly*) Never mind, my dear, we're alone, come down just as you are! (NORAH *is going*) (*reproachfully*) Norah—my own!

(*Enter* COBBS R. *with cloth, etc., for table.*)

NORAH. (*runs back and throws her arms round his neck*) I will be good now—but oh! I'se so dreffful hungry!

(*Exit* NORAH.)

COBBS. Well, now, if that ain't enough to melt the heart of a crocydile—(*calling*) Master Harry, sir—

HARRY. (*runs downstairs*) Yes, Cobbs—I'm here!

COBBS. Dinner's nearly ready, sir!

HARRY. That's excellent news, Cobbs, excellent! I'm really beginning to feel a little—a little—(*yawns*)

COBBS. Ah—tired—overdone, sir—yes, sir, travelling, sir, and the lady, sir?

HARRY. But not sleepy, Cobbs—not a bit sleepy!

(*During scene* COBBS *is laying cloth.*)

COBBS. No, sir! Certainly not, sir; not sleepy—travelling, sir—and the lady, sir?

HARRY. (*sitting before fire in arm-chair, thoughtfully*) Y—yes, and the lady——(*is silent for a moment as if considering*) You're a married man yourself now, ain't you, Cobbs?

COBBS. Yes, sir! Very much, sir,—I mean long, sir!

HARRY. Ah, then you've had experience and know all about it!

COBBS. Yes, sir, I think I may safely say, sir, as how I knows the ropes!

HARRY. Ropes, Cobbs?

COBBS. Beggin' your pardon, sir—I meanter say I ain't no novice!

HARRY. (*looking at him thoughtfully*) Yes, Cobbs, you *look* as if you'd seen a good bit—you look more—more weatherbeaten than you used to, Cobbs!

COBBS. Ah! that comes from the storms in the matterymonial teapot, sir! But lor' bless y'art, after a bit you don't take no notice! (*goes to door* R. *where he finds dinner tray*)

HARRY. (*thoughtfully*) N—no—no, but they

are wearing, Cobbs, and you get to look weather-beaten! (*gives himself a little shake as if to get rid of the recollection*)

COBBS. And here is dinner, sir!

HARRY. Oh—Norah will be glad! (*calling at foot of stairs*) Norah—Norah!

NORAH. (*appears at door sucking orange*) Well, yes?

HARRY. Dinner, my young moon, dinner!

NORAH. (*coming down stairs*) Dinner—dinner—dinner!

HARRY. Come along! (*sees her mouth*) Oh, but your mouth, Norah—its all orangy. (*rubs her mouth vigorously*—NORAH *pushes him away pettishly*) And your hair—tut, tut—dear—dear!

NORAH. (*looks at him with her lips going down, half sobs*) I—I'se so drefful, drefful hungry!

COBBS. (*aside to* HARRY) Take my advice, sir, a weatherbeaten old married man, sir, pass it over, sir, pass it over for once! (*crosses* L. C.)

HARRY. (*hesitates, looks at fowl*) Yes, and the fowl will be cold—well, well, well! (*somewhat severely to* NORAH) Come and let me put you up at the table, Norah! (*places her on chair, her head is barely visible over top of table*)

NORAH. The chair's too low!

HARRY. It's your fault—you're too little!

NORAH. I ain't little—it's the chair's fault!

HARRY. Dear—dear—can you oblige us with a cushion, Cobbs!

COBBS. Certingly, sir! Two, sir, if your good lady requires 'em!

(HARRY *takes* NORAH *down, places the two cushions then takes her under her arms.*)

HARRY. Now jump, Norah!

(*She jumps—the two children nearly capsize and land* NORAH *crookedly and sideways, holding on to table.*)

NORAH. Oh dear I'se welly wobbly, I ain't at all comfortable!

HARRY. (*looks round in despair at* COBBS) What are we to do, Cobbs?

COBBS. Come along, missy,—I mean, ma'am!

(*He takes her down then lifts her up—she places arms round his neck.*)

NORAH. Nice old Cobbs!

COBBS. (*aside to* HARRY) They all of 'em likes to be comf'able—bless 'em—now that's all serene! Now for a fair start! (*places fowl before* HARRY *has taken head of table*) Will you carve yourself, or shall I?

HARRY. I'll carve myself, thank you, Cobbs! My father always does—(*takes up carvers*) Knife in good order, Cobbs?

COBBS. First-rate sir!

NORAH. You'd better let Cobbs carve, I want my dinner!

COBBS. And the bacon, sir! (*places second dish before* HARRY)

HARRY. (*looks at fowl, squares elbows*) Would you prefer a leg or a wing, Norah?

NORAH. I don't want no bones—I want fowl!

COBBS. Give her the breast, sir, they're all partial to breast!

HARRY. (*tries to cut some meat off fowl but can't*) Isn't this fowl the wrong side up, Cobbs?

COBBS. (*looks at it*) No, sir, that's where the right side up mostly is, sir!

HARRY. (*struggling with fowl, gets flurried*) Dear—dear—tut, tut—the breast *must* be on the other side!

COBBS. (*anxiously*) Orn'ary breed of fowl I assure you, sir!

NORAH. (*begins to cry*) Oh what a mess! (*sob*) I want my dinner—(*sob*) I'se got a pain here! (*rubs her stomach—cries and sobs loudly*)

(HARRY *leans his carvers on table looking in silent despair at* COBBS.)

COBBS. You take my word for it, sir—there's something wrong with the build of that there fowl—let me have it out wi' him—he's too artful for you!

(NORAH *dries her eyes and looks hopeful.*)

You take the bacon, sir!

HARRY. I—I'm afraid I can't manage him, Cobbs. Can you ever forgive me, Norah?

NORAH. (*her eyes fixed on* COBBS, *her elbows on table*) Oh yes—don't bother!

COBBS. (*cutting up meat on plate for* NORAH, *pours gravy over it, potatoes*) A little salt, ma'am?

NORAH. Oh! I always salt myself, thank you, Cobbs!

COBBS. And now if Master Harry will favour us wi' a slice o' bacon. (HARRY *places it on plate*) There's a dinner fit for a Queen, ain't it now?

NORAH. (*throws her arms round his neck*) Dear—nice Cobbs—I love you, Cobbs!

COBBS. (*aside*) Bless 'em, they all does when we give 'em what they wants! (NORAH *eats greedily and quickly,* HARRY *leans his head pensively on one hand on table*) And now, sir, shall I help you to a leg, most gentlemen prefer the brown meat!

HARRY. If you please, Cobbs. (*looks at* NORAH *severely*) Norah, if you eat so fast you'll be sick!

NORAH. Mind oo're own busy—ness; oo can't carve!

HARRY. Dear! dear! (*moves a little away from table*)

COBBS. Never mind, sir, go on with the fowl, you will find it very comfortin'!

HARRY. (*eats*) We should like some cakes after dinner, Cobbs!

NORAH. And two apples and jam!

COBBS. Certainly, ma'am! Anything to drink beside the water?

HARRY. What have you in the cellar, Cobbs?

COBBS. Well, there be a rare cask o' old Indy Ale, sir, and a bottle o' fine old crusted port, sir. An' I can fix up a rattlin' bowl of punch in a jiffey for you and your good lady, sir!

HARRY. Well I think, Cobbs, you'd better bring us half a glass of currant wine each! Norah has always been accustomed to that and so have I.

COBBS. (*aside*) Two small goes o' currant wine!

(*During the above,* NORAH'S *head has been gradually drooping until she falls fast asleep with her head on her arms on table.*)

I'll go and fetch them at the bar, sir!

(*Exit* COBBS.)

HARRY. (*eating*) Will you have some more, Norah? Why—poor darling, she's fast asleep with her hair in the gravy, poor dear! (*takes his handkerchief and dries it*) If I lift her down I shall probably drop her, and she'll be crosser than ever! I'll wait until Cobbs comes back! Poor darling Norah, she'll have a crick in her neck, I'll try and make her more comfortable. (*moves his chair beside her, and rests her head on his shoulder*) There, my poor dear, darling young May Moon, that's better!

(*Enter* COBBS *with currant wine.*)

COBBS. Mrs. Harry Walmers Junior's fatigued, sir!

HARRY. Yes, she *is* tired, Cobbs. I think a Norfolk Biffin might rouse her—she is very fond of them!

COBBS. What do you think of a chamber candlestick, sir?

HARRY. Well yes, perhaps you *are* right, Cobbs, we will get her to bed—she'll wake up as bright as a button!

COBBS. Jest so, sir!

HARRY. I think the best way to manage will be, *I'll* carry Norah, and *you* carry the candlestick!

COBBS. Beggin' your pardon, sir, supposin' we reversed it, sir, I'll carry the lady and you carry the candlestick!

HARRY. I'm afraid Norah would feel hurt and think I was shirking my responsibilities.

COBBS. I'll tell you what, sir, let the lady herself decide!

HARRY. Of course, how thoughtless of me. Norah—darling—

NORAH. (*asleep*) Oh! I'se so dreffful hungry!

HARRY. Nonsense, Norah, you can't be hungry now, darling! You've only just had your dinner, dear! (NORAH'S *head drops again*) (*louder*) It's bed-time, Norah my own,—wake up, love!

COBBS. You'd much better let me carry her up, sir, just as she is—she'll never know the difference!

HARRY. No, Cobbs. I don't think that would be quite honourable. (*shaking her*) Norah—Norah!

(NORAH *lifts her head and looks at him in sleepy silence.*)

HARRY. (*louder*) You've got to go to bed, Norah dear! Do wake up—who would you like to carry you upstairs—me or Cobbs?

NORAH. (*sleepily—with closing eyes*) Don't wan't nobody—(*head drops*)

HARRY. But you must wake up, dear—come to your own Harry, my poor sleepy darling, he'll carry you up!

NORAH. No, you dropped me before, you're wobbly!

COBBS. (*aside to* HARRY) Strike while the iron's hot, sir—don't let her go off again!

HARRY. (*loudly*) Then will you have Cobbs, Norah?

(NORAH *opens her eyes and looks sleepily at* COBBS.)

COBBS. (*making propitiatory smile*) 'Ave Cobbs, ma'am—dear old Cobbs—nice old Cobbs!

NORAH. You ain't wobbly, are you?

COBBS. Wobbly, ma'am—Cobbs wobbly! Nelson's monument ain't in it with Cobbs for steadiness!

NORAH. (*holds out her arms to him*) Then you may cally me up!

COBBS. That's all right, my little beauty! (*takes her up very gently, she clasps her arms round his neck. Aside to* HARRY *over his shoulder as he goes to stairs*) Don't be cast down, sir—she'll be all right in the mornin'!

HARRY. (*cheerfully, taking candlestick*) Thank you, Cobbs. I'm not at all hurt! I really prefer the candlestick, only I thought it was my duty to ask Norah!

COBBS. (*going upstairs*) Ay—ay—sir—dooty, afore all, sir—will you oblige me by ringing the bell, sir?

(HARRY *rings bell on table.*)

NORAH. (*rubs her cheek which had laid against his face*) You're very bristly, Cobbs, you prick!

COBBS. (*upstairs*) There now, ain't that wonderful, Mrs. Cobbs' own obserwashion, beggin' your pardon, sir!

HARRY. (*following him up with candle*) Oh, never mind me, Cobbs!

(BETTY *appears at top of staircase* C.)

COBBS. Now, ma'am—you'll go with Betty—won't you—like a lady?

HARRY. (*aside to* NORAH) Try and be as grown up as you can, Norah. Cobbs will think you such a baby!

NORAH. (*with dignity*) Put me down, Cobbs!

COBBS. Yes, ma'am! (*puts her down.* HARRY *gives him candle*)

NORAH. Thank you for carrying me, Cobbs!

COBBS. Very welcome, ma'am!

NORAH. (*after rubbing her eyes*) Good night, Harry—I'm sorry I was cross, I'll be quite grown up again in the morning!

HARRY. That's my brave, devoted girl! (*they kiss through balustrade*) Don't forget your prayers, Norah!

NORAH. I shall only say God bless everybody to-night. I'se so dreffful sleepy!

HARRY. Good-night, my young May Moon!

NORAH. (*yawns*) Good-night. Good-night, Cobbs!

COBBS. Good night, ma'am!

NORAH. (*to* BETTY) Will you come and put me to bed please? (*kisses her hand to* HARRY)

(*Exeunt* NORAH *and* BETTY.)

COBBS. She's the right sort, sir—*she* is!

HARRY. Yes, she's a regular brick—when you know how to take her!

COBBS. (*handing him candle*—HARRY *had given it to him to hold when he was talking to* NORAH) Candle, sir—hot water for shavin' in the mornin' 'bout eight, sir? Don't forget your boots, sir!

HARRY. No, Cobbs—good-night! (*opens bedroom door*)

COBBS. Good-night, sir!

HARRY. (*pops his head out again*) I say, Cobbs——

COBBS. Yessir!

HARRY. I believe Norah has milk and water the first thing!

COBBS. All right, sir—it shall be attended to!

HARRY. And Cobbs——

COBBS. Yessir!

HARRY. Please tell Mrs. Cobbs to be very particular with Norah's hair—it was like a mop at dinner just now!

COBBS. Ah—it always capsizes 'em a bit, first

leavin' the home of their childhood—makes 'em jib a bit!

HARRY. They don't go on jibbing—do they, Cobbs?

COBBS. In course not, sir! It's only at the start, till they gets into a fair swinging trot! (*aside*) The Lord forgive me for the liar I am this night!

HARRY. That must be a great relief. Good-night, Cobbs!

COBBS. Good-night, sir!

(HARRY *exits and shuts his door.*)

COBBS. (*solus*) Whew! Judas—Ananias, and all the other liars as ever came out o' the ark aren't in the runnin' wi' *you* Jabez Cobbs, and your deception o' them two, blessed innercents! And how glad they was to see ye—wi' their *dear Cobbs*—an' their *nice Cobbs* and *our own old Cobbs*—ugh! the earth oughter a-opened and swallowed ye up, ye mean old raskil, sittin' there on that sofa wi' their beamin' eyes a-lookin' at ye, and believin' in ye—Cobbs—(*clearing away*) Cobbs—Cobbs—(*knocks himself hard on chest*)—where's your conscience? and yet it's my dooty to the Captain—to watch over them two blessed babbies—a-lyin' dreamin' up there asleep not half so hard as they does when awake wi' their marryins, and their Gretna Greens afore they've lost their milk teeth!

(*Enter* BETTY *from top of stairs.*)

COBBS. Where are't going, Betty?

BETTY. The little lass hanna a night-goond—I be goin' to fetch her one!

(*Exit* BETTY *door* R.)

COBBS. Well, I reckon I'll go down to the cellar and get out a bottle o' my best port for the Capt'n—

he'll need it a night like this—(*goes to window*) I wish the missus and the Captain was back! (*draws aside curtain—snow*) Lord how it do snow to be sure! Thank the Lord the babbies are safe in the feathers! Where's the Missus' basket o' keys—here they be—and here be the gent I'm after—(*takes out one*) Them cellar steps be mortal dark—I'll take the lamp (*chuckles*) If the missus could see her best lamp a walkin' down them cellar steps—wouldn't she squeal! (*takes up lamp*) Don't they go on jibbin' jest, Master Harry; they don't leave off till they turns up they toes, and then they go out havin' the last word—that you'll know when you're as weatherbeaten as old Cobbs. (*Opens cellar flap behind screen. Exits talking*)

(*Stage grows very dark—Pause—chimney clock strikes eight—scream heard from* NORAH'S *room.*)

NORAH. Harry!—Harry! (*throws open door, runs out in white petticoat with long sleeved body*) Harry!—Harry!

HARRY. (*in trousers and shirt from room* R.) Norah—Norah—what is it—what is it?

NORAH. (*rushing to him*) Harry—oh, there's somefin drefful under my bed! (*looks round in terror*)

HARRY. (*places his arm round her*) Nonsense, Norah—how—how can you be so silly!

NORAH. (*clings to him*) Oh! but there is—I know there is—I heard it!

HARRY. (*trying to disengage himself*) Absurd, Norah—I'll go in and show you there's nothing—come along!

NORAH. (*holding him very tight*) No—no—no, you shan't leave me, and I won't go into that drefful ugly room again!

(*wind whistles.*)

Sh! listen, Harry—its something—I know it is, and

it's coming—it's coming! Ah! (*screams and hides her face on his breast*)

HARRY. (*starts, looks round nervously*) Norah, for goodness' sake don't go on like this, you quite unman me!

NORAH. (*lifting her face and looking round—in ghostly whisper*) And oh, it's dreffful dark!—and oh, I'se so dreadful cold!

HARRY. I suppose it's very late and they're all gone to bed. I can see the fire. Come down, Norah, and I'll tuck you up on the sofa and sit beside you.

NORAH. Yes—but suppose the door was to open and *it* were to run after us——

HARRY. I will protect you, darling, at all costs! Come down, dear!

(*They both slip down looking fearfully behind them.*)

NORAH. (*starts at chair*) Oh what's that? Oh *do* call Cobbs!

HARRY. (*indignantly*) Call Cobbs, Norah,—never!!

NORAH. Why not?

HARRY. Death before dishonour! Norah, your knight is here to protect you! Come, my poor, sweet, darling young May Moon, come lie down on the sofa, and your Harry will cover you over with the table-cloth!

NORAH. Is it safe, do you think?

HARRY. I watch by your side, Norah,—if we perish, we perish together!

NORAH. But I don't want to perish!

HARRY. (*tucks her up*) There—now you are quite comfy and warm!

NORAH. Don't go away!

HARRY. No,—shall I hold your hand, Norah? (*takes chair to settle*)

NORAH. Yes!

(*They clasp hands.*)

HARRY. Shall I recite to you, Norah dear?

NORAH. Yes; you always make me go to sleep when you recite. (*Music cue*) Tell me the Young May Moon!

THE YOUNG MAY MOON.

The Young May Moon is beaming, love;
The glow-worm's lamp is gleaming, love!
How sweet to rove,
Through Morna's grove
When the drowsy world is dreaming, love.

(HARRY'S *voice gradually drops—the two children fall asleep—music ceases—their hands drop asunder, sound of arrival heard outside—voices, lights seen.*)

WALMERS. (*outside*) All right, Cobbs?

COBBS. (*outside*) All right and tight, too, sir!

WALMERS. (*outside*) Ah, I can never repay you both for your care of our little ones!

(*Enter* WALMERS, COBBS *and* MRS. COBBS.)

Where is Harry?

COBBS. (*with lamp*) All safe, sir—both on 'em safe, sir—up there—one in No. 4, t'other in No. 6.

MRS COBBS. (*discovers children on settle and chair*) Cobbs, y're tellin' a pack o' lies—the blessed lambs are here!

WALMERS. Don't wake her yet. She will be safe with you for to-night!

MRS. COBBS. Ay, that will she—the pretty lamb!

WALMERS. To-morrow she will be at home and will have forgotten. Leave us, Cobbs—leave us for a moment!

COBBS. (*aside*) Beggin' your pardon, sir, ye ain't goin' to be angry with master Harry, sir; you'll never see a finer boy, sir—

WALMERS. No, Cobbs, no, my good fellow—I know! I am not going to be angry with him!

COBBS. (*aside*) That's a marcie—if he'd a-bin down on that boy, I'd ha' fetched him a crack! (*To* MRS. COBBS) We're in the way—coom along oot, missus!

(*Exeunt* MR. *and* MRS. COBBS.)

WALMERS. (*shakes* HARRY *gently*) Harry—my dear boy—Harry!

HARRY. (*waking*) Father! Don't be angry with Cobbs—and—'sh! 'sh! *please* don't wake Norah!

WALMERS. (*raises* HARRY *and takes him down to chair* R. *of table*) I am not angry, my boy. I have only been terribly anxious. What made you think of doing such a thing?

HARRY. (*at* WALMERS' *feet*) *You* did!

WALMERS. I?

HARRY. You ran away, didn't you, with my mother to this very house on New Year's Eve and got married at Gretna Green?

WALMERS. (*sitting down and drawing him between his knees*) But we were much older, Harry!

HARRY. Not much—you were eighteen and she was sixteen—just the same difference between Norah and me; the advantage *should* be always on the man's side!

WALMERS. Harry, my boy—you must come home!

HARRY. And leave Norah?

WALMERS. Yes and leave Norah—for eight years!

HARRY. *Eight years!* (*sighs*) Its a very long time!

WALMERS. Not so long as it seems, Harry!

HARRY. Did it seem long to you, father?

WALMERS. Well you see, Harry, I was not engaged for eight years, I only knew your darling mother a week before we married!

HARRY. Ah, that wasn't time enough to form her character! You see I have known Norah for years—I know exactly how to take her!

WALMERS. (*takes his arm gently*) You must leave her now, Harry!

HARRY. Do you think people will talk? Cobbs once said to me a long time ago, that if we were so much seen about together, people would talk; and if my intentions weren't serious, it would be bad for Norah—will it be bad for her, father?

WALMERS. No, dear boy!

HARRY. She'll fret, I'm afraid!

WALMER. Not for long, Harry!

HARRY. (*goes over to her*) It—seems rather mean to sneak off when she's asleep, doesn't it?

WALMER. It is better so!

HARRY. She looks very pretty doesn't she—was my mother as pretty as Norah!

WALMER. She was beautiful, Harry!

HARRY. Ah! but then you didn't have to wait for eight years—

WALMERS. Come, dear boy—come!

HARRY. (*hesitatingly*) Please—I should like to kiss her before I go!

WALMERS. Very gently, my boy—don't wake her!

HARRY. No—I—I—won't wake her! (*kisses her—lays his head for an instant beside hers on the pillow*) Good-bye, Norah,—my dear little love; good-bye, my young May Moon—for eight years—(*covers his eyes with one hand, holds the other outstretched to his father*)

(*Enter* COBBS *and* MRS. COBBS *with blanket, she crosses to* NORAH, *tucks her up and remains beside her.*)

COBBS. The 'osses is in, please sir!

(MUSIC *as before till fall of curtain.*)

WALMERS. (*places his finger on his lip*) 'Sh!—'sh! (*moves toward door*)

PICTURE.

(COBBS—MRS. COBBS—NORAH *sleeping*—WALMERS *with* HARRY *in his arms at door.*)

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